Volume 12, Issue 36   Atari Online News, Etc.   September 3, 2010

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1236   09/03/10

  ~ FCC Wants More Feedback ~ People Are Talking!   ~ Internet Danger List!
  ~ Google's Priority Inbox ~ Chrome Marks 2nd B-day ~ Ohio LinuxFest 2010!
  ~ Samsung Unveils Galaxy! ~ HP Rolls Out Laptops! ~ 'Hack Is Wack'

~ Pigs Fly! Duke Nukem!   ~ Xbox Live Pricing Up! ~ Juror Gets Punished!

                    -* 'Hack Is Wack' Initiative! *-
                -* Spying Case - School District To Pay *-
              -* Apple vs. Facebook: Why Ping Controversy? *-

                              =~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard   "Saying it like it is!"
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""

Ya gotta love it here in Mew England!! Here we are, the long Labor Day
weekend marking the unofficial end of the summer, and a hurricane named
Earl is rapidly approaching us! During early Spring, we had days of
torrential rains, followed by over 25 days of 90+ temperatures, and now
we're closing the summer out with a hurricane!

While Earl has been severely downgraded, most of the east coast has been
shut down - just as the long holiday weekend was about to begin. People
headed our way for vacation, or those who were already here enjoying a
great week, have had to cut their vacation time short. It happens, and it
makes no sense to mess around with the likes of a hurricane. Sure, it
could fizzle out a bit (which it has, to some degree), but we've learned
to not take these storms lightly! The brunt of the storm is forecast to
hit here later this evening and run through until the wee hours into
tomorrow. We'll just have to wait it out and see what happens. I'm
hoping that the worst that we get is a good soaking, but we've prepared for
some high winds, and hope that we don't lose power or too many tree limbs.

But, once Earl passes off to the northeast on Saturday, we'll start to enjoy
the long holiday weekend. I'll be working part of the weekend, but that's
okay. I have plenty of time to cook on the barbecue, and the cold beers
are stocked! In the meantime, I'm going to get this week's issue out, and
then make any final preparations before Earl comes a-calling!

Until next time...

                              =~=~=~=

                         Ohio LinuxFest 2010

The eighth annual Ohio LinuxFest will be held on September 10-12, 2010 at
the Greater Columbus Convention Center in downtown Columbus, Ohio. Hosting
authoritative speakers and a large expo, the Ohio LinuxFest welcomes all
Free and Open Source Software professionals, enthusiasts, and everyone
interested in learning more about Free and Open Source Software.

Columbus, OHIO - The Ohio LinuxFest is proud to announce that registration
is now open for Ohio LinuxFest. The schedule has also been announced, and

this year will feature a fantastic line-up of talks for new and experienced Linux users. The 2010 Ohio LinuxFest takes place in Columbus, Ohio at the Greater Columbus Convention Center from September 10 through September 12.

As always, the main schedule takes place on Saturday. The schedule kicks off with a keynote from GNOME Foundation Executive Director Stormy Peters, followed by five tracks of talks from open source and Linux experts like Tarus Balog, Amber Graner, Catherine Devlin, Dru Lavigne, Paul Frields, and Jon 'maddog' Hall. This year's OLF also features a special medical track for those interested in the use of free and open source software in medicine.

The final keynote will be a real treat for Linux and open source enthusiasts interested in free media. Christopher "Monty" Montgomery of Xiph.org will be talking about next generation open source media formats.

Once again the Ohio LinuxFest is free to all, but space is limited. Sign up today at http://ohiolinux.org/register.html. If you want to support OLF, the organizers have made a supporter package available for $65 that includes lunch and an OLF t-shirt. For those who want to attend Friday's OLFU sessions, a professional pass is also available for $350.

                            =~=~=~=~=

                      PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                    compiled by Joe Mirando
                       joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and there's not much to talk about... again.

Well, there's always "the weather" to complain about. This is turning out to be a busy hurricane season so far, with tropical storms popping up like weeds. As I write this, my area is getting ready for Earl. It's not supposed to hit us head-on, but we're expecting heavy rain and a lot of wind.

So how long is it going to be before we face the idea that we've actually been affecting the weather to a greater and greater degree ever since the industrial revolution?

I don't want to sound alarmist or anything, but can anyone really believe that you can pump millions of tons of stuff like carbon dioxide and sulfur compounds into the air year after year and not have an effect?

There's a theory out there now called "snowball earth" that posits that our planet was, for a long while, completely covered in snow and ice. At first, the theory wasn't well-received. I don't recall everything about it anymore, but a quick Google search for "snowball earth" should turn up lots of results.

There's evidence of "global glaciation" in different spots all over the world, sediments and formations that you only see from glaciers, and some of the places they're seen are tropical. Even along the equator here and there. Now, THAT can be tricky because, as just about every sixth grader

knows, the continents move and shift. Parts that are along the equator
now, may well have been very much farther north or south at some point in
the distant past. So things like carbon dating have been used to ascertain
when the deposits were laid down and the formations created. And some very
smart people then sat down and figured out that it didn't make a difference
where on the planet the continents were 650 million or so years ago (or
6001 years ago if you're one of those fundamentalist types), the glaciers
were literally everywhere.

It wasn't well received for a couple of reasons, if I remember correctly.
First of all, no one could conceive of a reason for the earth to cool that
much in the first place. Second, they couldn't figure out a mechanism that
would have allowed it to thaw out again.

I don't remember all the details now, but what I do know of astrophysics
(armchair physics, actually... I know just enough to get myself tied up in
knots) tells me that the sun goes through quiet periods where it doesn't
throw quite as much energy as usual, and that is slowly but constantly
getting hotter. It's not getting hotter quickly enough for us to worry
about, but as time goes on it is getting warmer and warmer until, sometime
millions of years from now, it'll be so hot that it will have boiled off
the earth's oceans and left a dry, possibly airless ball of rock,
incapable of supporting life as we know it. But like I said, that'll be
many millions of years from now.

So the theory, if I remember correctly, is that for some reason...
perhaps a 'super volcano eruption' or the distribution of the earth's
continents along the equator, which would reflect more of the sun's energy
than ocean water would... things began to freeze up. Once there's ice
and/or snow involved, more and more of the sun's energy gets reflected
back out into space. Once things get cold enough, it's even possible
that the atmosphere itself might even begin to freeze and fall to the
ground, providing less 'air' to hold what little heat there was. So between
more reflection of the sun's energy and less atmosphere to hold it, it
just got colder and colder.

So, now that there's the possibility of it having happened, the problem
they were left with was that, once everything was frozen and shiny and
reflecting most of the sun's energy back into space through a constantly
thinning atmosphere, no one could think of a mechanism to make the darned
thing warm up again.

Then someone hit on the idea of volcanoes again. Imagine a volcano poking
up through a melted hole in miles of ice, belching out smoke and dust and
all kinds of stuff. That 'stuff' would eventually settle down on the
ice/snow and absorb heat from the sun instead of it just bouncing back out
into space. Of course, that would melt the ice and let the dust drop down
out of site, but it'd still have done its share to help melting. And then
there are the gases that the super volcano would belch out. Methane and
carbon dioxide are powerful greenhouse gases. That much is not in dispute.
If a 'super volcano erupted and belched methane and CO2 into the thin
atmosphere, it could have begun reversing the process. Dark patches of
methane ices.. like what was tending to clog up the pipe coming from the BP
deep sea oil well.. would have/could have absorbed more heat, melting ice
and carrying nutrients into the slowly thawing oceans, causing a sort of
slow motion explosion of certain types of bacteria and plant life, blowing
out more gases... oxygen among them, and thickening up the atmosphere to
hold more heat and melting more ice, which would run into the slowly
thawing oceans and carry more nutrients with it, which would result in more
gases being released, which would result in more growth, which would result

in more gases to thicken the atmosphere, which would melt more ice, expose more land to hold the heat to melt more ice. Well, you get the idea.

So if this is at all possible, why do some people find it so hard to believe that we could be affecting our current situation with the millions of tons of stuff we're belching into the atmosphere all the time? Did you ever stop to think about your spiffy air conditioner? It's using electricity, right? How do you think they generate that power? Coal, petroleum, natural gas... all of which put waste into the atmosphere. Sure, there's some hydro-electric and nuclear generated electricity mixed in there, more than likely, but it's a small part right now.

And I don't know how big of an issue it really is, but try a little experiment... go outside and feel the air around your air conditioning unit if you've got one... it's not the same temperature as the air 10 feet away, is it? No, it's not. What you're really doing is using physics (phase transition in the refrigerant in the air conditioner), powered by electricity, to extract heat from inside your house and transfer it to air outside your house. Well, you might think that this is a null-sum, since the heat inside your house must have come from somewhere to begin with, but you're also adding waste heat from the electricity being used too, so you end up pumping out more heat.

Wouldn't it be cool if you could use that heat to power the whole process in the first place? Oh, you'd have to use a little electricity anyway, like kick-starting a motorcycle or your car battery starting your engine until it can generate its own power for the spark, but if we could use that 'waste heat' somehow...

Or, better yet, find a way to 'bottle' that heat and use it in the winter to heat your home. No, I'm not talking about a giant thermos bottle or Dewar's flask, but maybe using that heat to charge super efficient batteries or some other way of holding on to its potential energy until you need it... imagine it; actually USING that heat instead of dumping it into the environment. I know it might sound silly, but think about the gasoline used in all of our cars. Think of the radiators in them... what are they there for? For blowing the 'waste heat' out into the atmosphere. I wonder if anyone has ever done a study of how much heat is actually released by all the cars, buses, boats and trains.. by all the internal combustion engines in the world... that's a lot of heat.

So back to my original question: Why is it so hard to believe that we really ARE changing the climate? Average temperatures have gone up since the industrial revolution, with most of the hottest years ever recorded having happened in the past decade and a half, tropical storms, which are formed because of temperature, have gotten worse and more common, and things are just generally more and more unsettled.

Could it possibly be because if we admitted it we'd have to give up our air conditioning... at least a few degrees of it, our cars and our always-on, electricity-sucking lifestyles? Let's be honest. I know that I dread the thought that I might not be able to leave my DVD player plugged in because, even when its 'off' it's still drawing power. Take a look around the house. Every item that has a clock running, a light that's on even when its off... they're all drawing power.

Maybe it's a good thing that we haven't figured out more efficient, more environmentally friendly way of generating power. Maybe the Cosmos, in its infinite wisdom, has kept that secret from us until we learn to conserve and be smarter about using what we DO have first. Maybe it'll only be then

that we learn to efficiently harness fusion power, geothermal, solar, and
maybe, eventually, the Cosmic Microwave Background itself. I guess we'll
have to wait and see.

Well, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time,
same station, and be ready to listen to what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

                                =~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Video Game Addiction Suit Can Continue!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Xbox Live Pricing Takes a Hike!
                                    Pigs Fly!! Duke Nukem Coming!
                                    And much more!

                                =~=~=~=

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News   - The Latest Gaming News!
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

                New 'Metroid' Game Strong on Plot, Short on Action

Followers of the "Metroid" game series from Nintendo are bound to covet
the latest offering, "Metroid: Other M," while those new to the series
will likely find it a bit stale.

"Metroid: Other M" (Nintendo, for Wii, $49.99) brings surprisingly few
engaging new features to the table. It's a title that banks on a solid
previous relationship with the gamer, rather than enticing new followers
with fancy graphics or innovative game play.

The game presents itself in third-person style, with some of the action
whizzing by left to right, in old-school scroller fashion. It's
positioned as an updated homage to a successful game series.

The plot is strong. I played as Samus Arun, a female protagonist clad in
formfitting, futuristic military garb. Earlier in the game series, Samus
destroyed the corrupted Metroid species, defeated their queen and snatched
a baby to study amid the carnage. That baby was destroyed before her eyes,
and in this title she's poised for a little payback.

Samus is a fighting member of the Galactic Federation and has detected a
signal in space code-named "Baby's Cry." She and a team venture forth to
investigate, weapons in hand.

The first few excursions were mild, as I slogged through some mundane
battles against bug-eyed, purple-winged things that were more annoying

than scary. Most of the initial action takes place in the corridors of a spacecraft where something horrible, of course, has happened.

"Metroid: Other M" introduces a dual-use shifting of the Wii remote position. I had to hold it in different positions for different situations. In "normal view" I held the remote sideways, jumping and shooting beams with the buttons on the right while navigating my movements with the control pad on the left.

In "search" view, I held the remote vertically and pointed it at the display searching for a door or enemy to lock my sites on and shoot a missile at. It was also handy for inspecting my surroundings for clues.

But it also got confusing. Some scenes require shooting prowess more than precision searches. Having to adjust the remote in my hand while being attacked felt like more of a chore rather than a fun aspect to controlling Samus' vantage point. It's really a solution in search of a problem.

There's an auto-aiming feature that takes the talent out of shooting enemies, but since the game was designed for the third-person view, there's really no way around it.

There's also a lovey-dovey back story to Samus and her commanding Federation officer, Adam. Given the amount of time invested in it during the lengthy cut scenes, I had hoped for more tension or explanation to that aspect early on. But the game makes you wait around before further defining their relationship.

For the most part "Metroid: Other M" is a fairly run-of-the-mill alien shooter. The graphics aren't much better than some old "Turok" titles, and the aliens appear jaggedly rendered on close inspection. Given advances in gaming design and technology, it seems like a waste to have updated a decent game series with a treatment that doesn't introduce anything terribly inventive.

Two stars out of four.

Pigs Fly! Duke Nukem Forever To Ship in 2011

To paraphrase Mark Twain, there are lies, damned lies, and Duke Nukem Forever stories. The game's been vaporware for over a decade. Leaked screens and gameplay videos from so-called alpha versions occasionally emerge then fade in a muddle of half-baked theories, forum mockery, and fan dismay. When the game's now defunct publisher 3D Realms talk about the game these days, few listen.

Until today, that is.

Yesterday 3D Realms president George Broussard teased gamers with a picture of pigs flying. (In a 2006 1UP interview, Broussard joked the game would be out when pigs flew.) Today, he's explaining what that means. Or at least the game's new developer is.

At PAX Prime 2010, Gearbox (Brothers in Arms, Borderlands) president Randy Pitchford confirmed rumors that his studio has assumed responsibility for the practically mothballed shooter. What's more, he announced it'll be playable - that's right, playable - on the show floor.

"People seem to be enjoying the game a lot," reads a dispatch from 2K Games' Twitter feed. "How many [PAX] folks thought they'd leave Seattle having played [Duke Nukem Forever]?"

The game, due in 2011, will be available simultaneously for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Microsoft Windows.

"Duke Nukem, the interactive entertainment industry's most irreverent and quoted character of all time, will bring his signature brand of babe-lovin', cigar-smoking, beer-chugging and ass-kicking action as he once again saves the Earth and our babes from hordes of invading aliens," wrote 2K Games in a press statement. "In other shocking news, Duke Nukem Forever will be playable right now for all attendees 17 and older of this year's Penny Arcade Expo at the 2K Booth...giving the first hands-on experience with the game that was originally announced during the tail end of the Clinton Administration."

"All great things take time... a lot of time," said 2K president Christoph Hartmann. "After a hiatus from the video game world, Duke Nukem is back and better than ever. The return of the King from the glory days of shooters will satisfy our patient, die-hard fans, as well as a new generation of bubble gum-chewing, flat top and shades-wearing bad-asses."

"Make no mistake about it - Duke Nukem Forever is a testament to the era of when shooters were bodacious and fun."

It's been so long I don't remember how the last one ended, but I do remember the multiplayer matches with freeze-rays, shrink-guns, and the helpless terror of a gigantic boot filling my CRT. In DNF, it sounds like the alien pig cops and titanic bosses are back, along with plenty of profanity and anatomical ogling.

"This game puts pedal to the metal and tongue firmly in cheek, among other places," reads 2K's description. "Shoot hoops, lift weights, read adult magazines, draw crude messages on whiteboards or ogle one of the many beautiful women that populate Duke's life; that is if you can pull yourself away long enough from kicking ass and taking names."

If anyone can pull it off, well - Gearbox isn't faultless when it comes to game design, but they're light years ahead of 3D Realms. Kudos to George Broussard and company for finally stepping aside.

Play 'StarCraft II 'On Multiple Monitors with Actual Tools Utility

Megaseller Starcraft II: Wings of of Liberty has few technical weaknesses, and one of the big ones - the inability to make effective use of multiple monitors - was expressly built-in to the game by Blizzard to give single-monitor users a fighting chance.

"Multi-monitor support for 'StarCraft II' may be too great of a tactical advantage over other players without more than one monitor," Blizzard explained on Battle.net.

For those more interested in victory than fairness (and who isn't, really), Actual Tools' Actual Multiple Monitors (AMM) 2.3 can help those with more

than one screen re-unbalance game play.

"Starcraft II" normally only lets players make minimal user of multiple screens. The game locks the mouse within its host screen, and, if you alt-tab into another window, the game window automatically minimizes. This means you can't keep an eye on the game while doing something else. Furthermore, minimization and restoration of the game is slow. AMM, which costs $29.95 (a free 30-day trial is also available), lets users block the minimization, freeing them up to operate outside the game window, and on other monitors as well.

AMM is available now via the Actual Tools Web site.

Xbox Live Pricing Takes a Hike, But Not The Right Kind

Sometimes Microsoft gets it right, but sometimes it gets it head-smacking wrong. Charging $100 for a wireless adapter would be the latter, while charging $300 for an souped-up Xbox 360 with integrated wireless may by contrast induce jaw-on-the-floor-itis. Charging $50 a year to access premium content is fine. Charging $50 a year to play online against other gamers isn't.

Slapping a $10 premium on that $50 Xbox Live annual fee? The new normal, come November 1st this year, effective in Canada, Mexico, the UK, and of course, the United States.

From November 1st, the annual cost for an Xbox Live Gold membership is rising from $49.99 to $59.99 in the U.S. A three month subscription will in turn jump from $19.99 to $24.99. And a month-to-month subscription? Yep, that's going up a tick too, from $7.99 to $9.99.

"Since launching Xbox LIVE in 2002 we have continually added more content and entertainment experiences for our members, while keeping the price the same," wrote Microsoft's Larry 'Major Nelson' Hryb on his Xbox-themed blog. "We're confident that when the new pricing takes effect, an Xbox LIVE Gold membership will continue to offer the best value in the industry."

I doubt it, since it doesn't /currently/ offer the best value in the industry. Sony's got Microsoft beat hands down, offering its PlayStation Plus service with premium content for $50 a year while wisely keeping multiplayer on the free side of the pay wall--as it's been for decades and remains for PC gamers, MMO's notwithstanding.

In any event, if you want to lock in your current price, presumably for one final 12 month span, Hryb writes "we do want to thank our loyal members and give you the opportunity to lock in your current price with an additional discount, so now would be a good time to renew your subscription." It's a better deal than you've been getting, offering a year for $39.99, though it's obviously just a carrot to help ease the longterm pain of the stick.

That new longterm outlook? Let's say the Xbox 360 survives another five years. That's $300 you'll be spending, or $50 more than you would've paid at the $50 price tier.

Judge Says Video Game Addiction Suit Can Continue

A federal judge has ruled that a man who says he's psychologically
dependent and addicted to an online video game can proceed with some of his
lawsuit against the game's South Korean manufacturer.

Craig Smallwood says "Lineage II" left him unable to function independently
in daily activities, such as getting dressed, bathing or communicating with
family and friends.

Smallwood says he's spent more than 20,000 hours playing the multiplayer
online role-playing game since 2004. The 51-year-old says NCSoft Corp.
never warned him about the danger of game addiction.

A Honolulu law firm that represents the company had urged that the case
be dismissed, but U.S. District Judge Alan Kay in his Aug. 4 ruling
allowed half of the eight counts to continue.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

FCC Asks for More Feedback on Net Neutrality

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission, in the midst of a long and
often contentious debate over whether it should enact formal rules
prohibiting broadband providers from selectively blocking or slowing Web
content, is asking the public for more comments about network neutrality.

The FCC will seek comments on whether net neutrality rules should apply to
mobile broadband or specialized and managed services, FCC Chairman Julius
Genachowski announced Wednesday. Under a net neutrality proposal released
by Verizon Communications and Google in August, mobile broadband and
managed services would be exempt from net neutrality rules, but many
consumer and digital rights groups have complained that those exemptions
would fragment the Internet and hurt users.

"Recent events have highlighted questions on how open Internet rules should
apply to 'specialized' services and to mobile broadband - what framework
will guarantee Internet freedom and openness, and maximize private
investment and innovation," Genachowski said in a statement. "As we've
seen, the issues are complex, and the details matter. Even a proposal that
accepts enforceable rules can be flawed in its specifics and risk
undermining the fundamental goal of preserving the open Internet."

The FCC's wireline and wireless bureaus will seek new public comment on
managed services and on mobile broadband, Genachowski announced. The
extended deadline for comments on the original net neutrality notice of
proposed rulemaking ended in April.

Genachowski's plan to pass formal net neutrality rules hit a roadblock in

April, when a U.S. appeals court ruled that the FCC did not have authority to enforce informal principles in a case involving Comcast throttling peer-to-peer traffic. Genachowski then called on the FCC to reclassify broadband as a regulated, common-carrier service as a first step toward creating formal net neutrality rules, but broadband carriers have resisted the change. Dozens of U.S. lawmakers have called on the FCC to defer decisions on broadband reclassification to Congress.

The National Cable and Telecommunications Association, a trade group representing cable-based broadband providers, promised Wednesday to work with the FCC on net neutrality rules. The new inquiry raises "important and complex issues," NCTA said in a statement.

Randolph May, president of conservative think tank the Free State Foundation, praised the FCC for issuing the new inquiry.

"Seeking further comment on the issues relating to specialized services and wireless platforms can only serve to further clarify the issues and, potentially, bridge differences," May said. "This is surely positive."

Companies and groups debating net neutrality rules have "made progress" since the FCC issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on net neutrality in October, Genachowski said in his statement. A consensus for a set of enforceable net neutrality, or open Internet, rules is growing, he said.

However, Public Knowledge and Media Access Project, two groups calling for strong net neutrality rules, called on the FCC to move forward with net neutrality rules. Nothing in the new inquiry would prevent the FCC from reclassifying broadband and passing net neutrality rules, Gigi Sohn, Public Knowledge's president, said in a statement.

The FCC has already received comments on net neutrality rules for mobile broadband and managed services in two proceedings, Sohn said.

"Recent events prove that giant companies left to regulate themselves will craft rules full of loopholes and exceptions that benefit their own interest, not the public interest," added Matt Wood, associate director of Media Access Project. "The commission asks the same questions time and time again about wireless broadband services and specialized services, instead of providing basic answers on the basis of the robust record it already has compiled."

U.S. Delays Web Traffic Rules by Seeking More Comment

U.S. communications regulators on Wednesday put off a controversial decision on Internet traffic rules, giving industry and consumer groups a chance to forge a compromise while avoiding a politically sensitive issue ahead of the November elections.

The Federal Communications Commission has been prodding phone, cable and Internet companies for months to find consensus on the thorny issue of net neutrality - a debate over whether high-speed Internet providers should be allowed to give preferential treatment to content providers who pay for faster transmission.

Broadband and Internet companies have held a series of face-to-face and phone meetings this summer to craft a framework on how to treat the

Internet data flowing through both home connections and wireless devices.

But those talks have failed to yield a deal due to big differences over the treatment of wireless broadband in particular. At stake is how quickly handheld devices, like Research in Motion's BlackBerry and Apple's iPhone, can receive and download videos and other content.

Rather than imposing stricter regulations that are opposed by broadband providers, FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski delayed a decision by calling for more public comment. He wants to know how companies and consumers will be impacted if wireless devices are treated differently from home broadband lines.

"We have made progress over the last year - but we still have work to do," Genachowski said.

Analysts said Genachowski, who proposed a set of open Internet rules last year, wants to tread carefully before the elections.

They also said it was unlikely the FCC would adopt draft proposals at the September 23 meeting or in October.

"The chairman could cite progress in the industry talks as grounds for delaying circulating a draft order, and postpone a decision until after the election," said Nicolaus Stifel analyst Rebecca Arbogast.

Democrats are afraid that Republicans will portray any FCC action to voters as an attempt by President Barack Obama and his party to control and regulate the Internet, analysts have said.

Some broadband providers are pointing to a proposal unveiled earlier this month by Google Inc and Verizon Communications Inc as a sign of progress. Their plan would give providers more flexibility to manage wireless broadband traffic and possibly create a fast lane.

"Even a proposal that accepts enforceable rules can be flawed in its specifics and risk undermining the fundamental goal of preserving the open Internet," Genachowski said in a statement seeking another 55 day-comment period.

Proponents of net neutrality, including public interest groups, argue consumers will be harmed if carriers create a two-tiered Internet, the top tier offering faster speeds at a premium.

Carriers such as AT&T Inc and Verizon say they need to prioritize traffic on wireless networks due to congestion and already do so on handsets to allow people to make and receive phone calls.

FCC Rejects Proposal for Free Wireless Service

Federal regulators have shot down a proposal by a startup called M2Z Networks Inc. to build a free, nationwide wireless broadband network using a spare slice of airwaves.

The Federal Communications Commission on Wednesday said it has rejected M2Z's request that the agency demand that the winner of an auction for the radio spectrum provide free Internet service to anyone who connects to it.

That condition would have mirrored M2Z's business model of offering free basic wireless broadband access - with speeds of up to 768 kilobits per second - that would be supported by advertising in addition to a faster, premium service.

"We gave careful and thorough consideration to the proposal, but ultimately determined that this was not the best policy outcome," Ruth Milkman, head of the FCC's wireless bureau, said in a statement. The FCC did not explain its rejection further.

M2Z's plan had encountered resistance from T-Mobile USA and other big wireless carriers, which warned that it would interfere with their own services.

"A designer allocation auction that would be tailored for one company was not in the public's interest, especially when that company was offering broadband service that is slow by even yesterday's standards," Steve Largent, head of industry trade group CTIA-The Wireless Association, said in a statement.

M2Z was founded in 2005 by John Muleta, a former FCC official who at one time also headed the agency's wireless bureau, and Milo Medin, co-founder and chief technology officer of cable modem pioneer (At)Home. The company's investors include several top Silicon Valley venture capital firms, including Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers and Redpoint Ventures.

In a statement, Muleta said "the FCC's decision to delay the use of this valuable spectrum forgoes the consumer welfare and economic stimulus that would result from putting new spectrum into the marketplace."

The FCC is still studying possible uses of the spectrum.

                        HP Rolls Out Its Fall Line of Laptops

Hewlett-Packard on Wednesday rolled out its latest laptop models for fall 2010. Among its offering is its first 3D laptop, as well as upgrades to its existing line of laptops.

Undoubtedly, the model that will get the most attention is the HP Envy 17, the company's first laptop to showcase ATI's 3D technology. With the Envy 17 3D, HP is basically selling a 120-Hz stereoscopic screen, which replaced the original one on the Envy 17. Above the screen, near the Webcam, is a built-in receiver that talks to a pair of 3D glasses that HP bundled with the laptop. HP is also releasing a souped-up Envy 14 Special Edition. The crimson and black chassis, with the Beats audio skin emblazoned on the aluminum lid, echoes the color scheme of the bundled Beats By Dr. Dre headphones, usually a $200 option.

The Envy 14 Special Edition retails for $1,249 for the base configuration. Prices for the Envy 17 3D configurations were not finalized as of press time, but expect them to fall under the $2,000 mark.

HP also launched a completely redesigned HP Pavilion dm3. It will be the first to showcase what HP calls its CoolSense technology, which includes better part placement and design methodology. The dm3 uses a combination of plastic, glass, and soft-touch paint on the outside, while metals are

used strategically on the inside to reduce heat conductivity. The air vents are placed toward the back, where the air is blown away from the laptop instead of toward the device, which is what happens when vents are on the bottom. All the heat conducting parts - the ATI graphics and Core i3 processor - reside below the keyboard rather than the area where your palm rests. The dm3 will cost $549 with an Intel Pentium dual-core CPU.

Not to be left out, the HP Mini 210 also gets a makeover, the main update being, well, skin-deep. The new Mini 210 models come in a range of colors, including (brace yourself) Ocean Drive (blue), Luminous Rose (pink), Crimson Red, Lavender Frost, and Charcoal. There are also optional coordinating laptop sleeves and computer mice for each color. The business-oriented Mini 5103, meanwhile, consoles itself with a sleek espresso chassis. Both models share a lightweight form factor (under 3 pounds) and an island-style keyboard that is rising in popularity among laptop manufacturers.

Samsung Unveils iPad Competitor Galaxy

Samsung Electronics Co. on Thursday unveiled a new tablet PC named Galaxy Tab as the latest device meant to rival Apple Inc.'s popular iPad.

The device offers users "a new galaxy of possibilities" with features such as mobile video conferencing and a video chat function, Samsung Europe telecom executive Thomas Richter said at Berlin's IFA consumer electronics fair.

The thin tablet device weighs 13.4 ounces (380 grams) and has a 7-inch (18-centimeter) touch screen, making it about three times that of an Apple iPhone, but roughly a third smaller than an iPad.

Richter said it comes with Google Inc.'s Android 2.2 operating system, which can run HTML5 and Adobe's Flash Player - unlike the iPad.

The Galaxy will allow users to browse the web and check e-mail just as on a regular PC, Richter said.

"The Samsung Galaxy Tab has been designed to enable consumers to maximize their online experience wherever that may be," the head of Samsung's mobile communications business, J.K. Shin, said.

The price of the device will depend on telecommunications operators through which it will be available starting next month in Europe and later in fall in the U.S. and Asia, Samsung said.

The device supports Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and 3G cell phone networks, making it a combination of smart phone and laptop. It "turns out to be a perfect speakerphone on the desk, or a mobile phone on the move via Bluetooth headset," Samsung said.

The tablet PC also comes with two cameras, one 3-megabyte digital camera with a flash on the back of the device, and a second camera on the front for video conferences - a feature the iPad lacks, but other competitors such as Dell's Streak tablet PC also offers.

The company said that the device's battery would support more than eight

hours of continuous multimedia usage, or seven hours of video play.

The tablet also comes with Swype, a third-party application already found on Samsung's Galaxy 5 series phone and available for some other Android-based handsets, which allows users to type on virtual keyboards by simply swiping fingers around from one letter to the next, lifting only between words.

The application then uses an algorithm to determine the word that is intended, which the company says allows for typing speeds of more than 40 words per minute.

Commercial success of the device will be crucial for the world's largest maker of computer memory chips, flat screen TVs and liquid crystal displays.

Samsung's quarterly profit surged by 83 percent to a record high of 4.28 trillion South Korean won ($3.6 billion) in the second quarter ended June 30, but the company warned that intensifying competition in areas like mobile phones could dent earnings in coming quarters.

Samsung is currently the world's second largest cell phone manufacturer after Nokia.

Google Set To Unveil "Priority Inbox" for Gmail

Google is set to unveil a new feature to its Gmail service that aims to separate a user's important emails from the ones that do not get read often.

The new feature called "Priority Inbox" will help users focus on messages that matter without having to set up complex rules, Google said in its official blog.

The Priority Inbox application splits the inbox into three sections: 'Important and unread', 'Starred' and 'Everything Else'.

"As messages come in, Gmail automatically flags some of them as important. Gmail uses a variety of signals to predict which messages are important, including the people you email most and which messages you open and reply to," the company said.

Google said Priority Inbox will roll out to all Gmail users, including those who use Google Apps, over the next week.

Facebook's New Security Feature: Remote Logouts

Facebook is rolling out a new security feature that lets users log out of their accounts remotely from another computer.

To do this, go to "account settings" on your Facebook page and click on "change" next to "account security." There, you'll see where else your Facebook account is logged in, including the type of device and the city it's in or near. To log out of any of them, click "end activity."

Facebook is making this available over the next couple of weeks. It will be accessible on computers, but not mobile devices.

The feature is similar to what Google Inc.'s Gmail offers to its users, and Facebook says it's designed to help users keep their logins secure.

MySpace Users Can Now Sync Posts to Facebook

MySpace, which recently revamped itself to look more like Facebook, is now allowing users to sync their posts to Facebook, too.

That means people on Facebook can see their friends' MySpace items without leaving Facebook.

MySpace users will also be able to share music, videos, game applications, links and photos across both social networking sites.

The changes announced Monday are part of an overhaul at MySpace, which has faced falling advertising revenue and stagnant user growth.

The News Corp. unit is also in the midst of renegotiating a search partnership as its deal with Google Inc. is nearing a close.

Chrome Update Marks Web Browser's Second Birthday

Google released an improved version of Chrome on Thursday as the Internet titan's Web browser turned two years old.

"Looking back today on Chrome's second anniversary, it's amazing to see how much has changed in just a short time," Google product manager Brian Rakowski said in a blog post.

"All browsers have come a long way in the last two years and the Web has become much more fun and useful."

Web browsers are software programs that people use to access and navigate the vast sea of data on the Internet.

Google simplified the Chrome interface and made the color scheme "easier on the eyes" while making it faster and enhancing safety features such as warnings about websites that might be booby-trapped by hackers, according to Rakowski.

Studies Identify Most Dangerous Place to Surf Online

Two studies published this week examined Web surfing safety during July. Both identified the safest places on the Web to surf and both came from companies well-known for their free anti-virus protection. Apart from those similarities, however, they offered quite different viewpoints.

Researchers at AVG, home of AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition 9.0, collated data from over 100 million AVG-equipped PCs around the world to determine the riskiest online countries. The security experts behind Avira AntiVir Personal 10 surveyed Internet users, and asked "Where do you suspect is the greatest danger of malware infection on the Internet?"

In AVG's study Turkey tops the danger list. One in 10 AVG installations in Turkey have been required to take action against malware attacks. Users in Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan also needed frequent protection. Right here in the USA one in 48 users were attacked, putting us in the top 10 riskiest countries.

AVG didn't state how many users have registered the product in broadband-poor Sierra Leone, but only one in 696 of that group got hit with malware, giving Sierra Leone the dubious honor of being the safest place to surf. Japan wasn't far behind, with just 1 in 403 sophisticated Japanese Web users attacked. Going traveling soon? You'll want to review the full report and possibly pack some extra security software depending on your destination.

AVG chief research officer Roger Thompson offered additional insight in his security blog. Thompson suggested making a full backup and removing all sensitive information before traveling in one of the risky countries (including the U.S., I suppose).

Avira's researchers, meanwhile, surveyed a random sample of their 100 million users, asking their opinion on what areas of the Web are the most dangerous. Many felt porn sites were the most dangerous, or sites hawking cracked software, but the biggest group, over a third of the respondents, agreed with the statement "When it comes to security, all Web sites are equally dangerous". The full Avira survey lists all the percentages, but I find that most popular choice very significant.

Sites involved in shady activities like displaying porn or distributing stolen software may also include drive-by downloads or other malicious code, certainly. But a big, popular site that's been hacked can be just as dangerous. The attack doesn't even have to come directly from the site - sometimes malefactors infiltrate "poisoned" ads into a standard rotation of banner advertisements.

Sorin Mustaca, an Avira data security expert, agreed, saying "it's encouraging to see that over 33 percent of our user base has learned that security threats can come from any Web site." On the other hand, he noted, "it's also a statement on our society at large when one out of every three people can't trust any of the Web sites they visit". I wouldn't go quite that far. You can probably trust most Web sites to refrain from deliberately attacking your browser. Just don't let your guard down, because the best, most virtuous site might deliver a malware payload unintentionally.

Symantec, Snoop Dogg Partner for 'Hack is Wack' Initiative

If you read PCMag regularly you know more than the average Jo about how to protect your computer and your personal information from all kinds of cyber-attacks. That puts you way ahead of the crowd, but you'd be even safer if everybody took proper precautions. To reach a wider audience with its security message, the techies at Symantec are enlisting some

new help - rapper Snoop Dogg and YOU. Yes, you can be part of their new "Hack is Wack" initiative by submitting your own rap video for a chance to win awesome prizes.

The contest runs from now until September 30 on hackiswack.com.

Use your musical skills to create a rap video on the subject of staying safe from identity theft, viruses, hack attacks, or any aspect of cybercrime. Check the HackIsWack Web site for a full listing of the rules. When your video is perfect, upload it to the site. Or, if your talent runs more to listening than rapping, visit the site to view and rate the videos.

Making a video, even a short one, takes some serious time and effort. Why would you bother? Prizes and recognition, that's why. Symantec will fly the winner and a friend to Los Angeles and put them up in a hotel for two nights. The winner will "meet with Snoop's management, learn more about his business, and get tips on how to make it to the top." Also included are two tickets to a Snoop Dogg concert and a shiny new laptop loaded with the Norton Internet Security 2011.

Again, the contest ends September 30, so get busy writing those rhymes and laying down your tracks. Once the entry period closes Symantec and Snoop's management team will select the winner, to be announced on October 20. Will it be you?

Apple vs. Facebook: What's Behind the Ping Controversy?

Wondering why you can't use Facebook to find your friends on Ping - Apple's new iTunes-based social network that supposedly connects to the social networking site? Turns out Apple and Facebook were unable to reach a business agreement that would have integrated Facebook with Ping, according to reports. But the failure to reach an agreement apparently didn't stop Apple from trying to offer the functionality anyway - until Facebook pulled the plug. Here's what's going on.

Whenever a third-party service wants to access Facebook user information it must go through Facebook's application programming interfaces (APIs) to get it. The APIs are usually free to use except for services that make more than 100 million information requests a day. In those cases, the third party (Apple in this case) must negotiate terms of use with Facebook, according to Facebook's Developer Principles and Policies.

The prospect of partnering with Apple reportedly was of concern to Facebook, which fretted about potentially sudden and massive Web traffic loads. The fear was that Ping users would flood Facebook servers causing "site stability" and "infrastructure" problems, according to The New York Times.

It's too early to tell how many of Apple's 160 million iTunes account holders are using Ping. Then again, the mad rush to try out new Apple products can often overwhelm a business partner's technical resources, such as AT&T's computer glitches during the recent iPhone 4 launch. So it's easy to see why Facebook would worry about a mass influx of Ping users slamming Facebook's network. For users, however, the failure to come to an agreement is unfortunate. Facebook integration would have made it much easier for you to find people you know on Ping.

When Apple demonstrated Ping during its annual fall product launch event on Wednesday, many noticed that Ping included Facebook integration.

But later that day, when iTunes 10 became publicly available, Facebook functionality was missing - although some users reported having brief access to Facebook integration in Ping when iTunes 10 launched.

Ultimately, initial talks between Apple and Facebook failed, because of Facebook terms that CEO Steve Jobs described as "onerous," according to numerous reports. Nevertheless, Apple reportedly tried to implement Facebook integration into Ping without authorization, according to AllThingsD. But it didn't take long for Facebook to figure out Apple's ploy, and Ping was soon cut off from Facebook.

Facebook and Apple are reportedly still in discussions over Ping, but it's unclear how long the negotiations will take or whether they will be successful.

In the meantime, Apple should consider other ways to make it easier to find friends on Ping. Many social networks (including Facebook) let you find your friends by importing contact information from Gmail, Hotmail, and AOL Instant Messenger. That would be a workable alternative for Ping until the two companies can work out their differences.

Is Consumer Watchdog Losing Credibility With its Google Feud?

Consumer Watchdog, a consumer advocacy group that has criticized Google for its privacy policies, released a disturbing commercial cartoon featuring Google's chief executive creepily selling ice cream to children and saying, "There's no such thing as a free ice cream. ... Now, hold still while we collect some of your secrets."

The commercial, which plays in Time Square until Oct. 15, also urges those watching to contact their members of Congress to protest Google and other Internet companies collecting information without permission, as well as asking for a "Do Not Track Me" list. Google was singled out for its "tone-deafness to privacy" said spokesman John Simpson.

Previously, Consumer Watchdog hammered Google for spying on members of Congress byuploading e-mail or Website viewing information while the search engine giant's vans were mapping out its Google Street View. The information was taken from the politicians' unsecured home wireless networks. Google said that it had collected the information accidentally and had isolated the material so it could not be used. But no one seemed to be more critical than Consumer Watchdog, whose harsh criticism seemed to be a bit off-key. While Google did take information that wasn't expressly given to them, unsecured networks are available for anyone, even someone walking down the street to see.

The incident did spark some controversy with many questioning Google's motives for data collection and sparking a backlash against the company's latest user tracking to gather advertising data.

Some questioned if Google's "Don't be evil" motto was in jeopardy.

But the latest volley from Consumer Watchdog, using CEO Eric Schmidt as

a grotesque cartoon figure peddling ice cream to children, is way over the top. There can be little doubt that the group is more than a little biased against the Internet titan and it should be making more people question the advocacy group's credibility. Are these people really out for your best interests or their own?

While I'm not saying that there isn't a valid argument for a "Do Not Track" list, Consumer Watchdog has given up any semblance of objectivity by continuing to target Google as Internet privacy's foe. Surely Facebook has given its users plenty of privacy worry, and hackers have routinely targeted big box stores to steal credit card numbers, so is the group setting its sights on Schmidt?

Yes, Schmidt did make a stupid, cavalier statement, "If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place." (And he should know - a tell-all blog by Schmidt's alleged mistress was swiftly taken down from Blogger, owned by Google, according to Valleywag.) And it's only justice that such a statement can be used against him.

However, a consumer advocacy group should maintain its objectivity so consumers can learn to trust their information and research. The group's existence should be solely to protect consumers and their interests. Otherwise the group looks like a biased organization blatantly gunning for someone to destroy in hopes of scoring some publicity.

Business owners and consumers should be mindful of this as they peruse the latest headlines and separate advocacy groups that truly seem to be fighting for the betterment of society and those that will do anything to gain publicity or notoriety.

Nigerian Advance-fee Scammer Gets 12 Years

A Nigerian man has been sentenced to 12 years in prison for sending out fraudulent e-mails offering victims big bucks in exchange for moving cash to the United States.

Okpako Mike Diamreyan, 31, was sentenced to 151 months of prison Wednesday by United States District Judge Janet Hall in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

Diamreyan made more than US$1.3 million in a scam that suckered 67 victims between 2004 to 2009, prosecutors said. This type of fraud, called an advance-fee scam, was the number-one type of Internet fraud in 2009, according to the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation. Last year, advance-fee fraud accounted for nearly 17 percent of the Internet fraud logged by the FBI.

Diamreyan pretended to be different people - Prince Nana Kamokai of Sierra Leone or an airport director from Ghana, for example. He said he needed to move between $11.5 million and $23.4 million out of the country and offered victims 20 percent of the funds, if they would help him out.

After using fake documentation to convince his victims that he was legitimate, Diamreyan would get them to wire him different types of fees such as "PIN code fees" or courier services charges with the understanding that they would then get the money. These fees would pile

up, but the promised money never arrived.

The scam left "many individuals and their families in financial ruin,"
the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement.

Diamreyan immigrated to the United States in 2008 and allegedly told an
acquaintance that he wanted to make $1 million or so before going home
to Nigeria: "i want to forget america and come back home... once i take
like 1m or half m," prosecutors quote him as saying.

He was arrested in August 2009 and found guilty by a jury in February.

Judge: Pennsylvania District Must Pay $260K in Spying Case

A federal judge says a suburban Philadelphia school district embroiled in
a laptop spying scandal must pay a family's lawyer about $260,000.

Lower Merion School District was ordered Monday to pay attorney Mark
Haltzman for work done in a civil case involving allegations school
officials improperly used webcam-enabled laptops to spy on students.

Senior U.S. District Judge Jan DuBois says Haltzman deserves to be paid for
work he did that led to an injunction barring the district from secretly
monitoring activity on school-provided laptops.

Haltzman represents Blake Robbins, who claims the district photographed him
400 times in a 15-day period last fall, sometimes as he slept or was
half-dressed.

District officials say they are disappointed in the judge's decision.

Judge Punishes Michigan Juror for Facebook Post

A Detroit-area woman who was removed from a jury for commenting about the
ongoing case on Facebook has a longer writing task ahead: a five-page essay
about the constitutional right to a fair trial.

A judge ordered the essay Thursday for Hadley Jons, three weeks after
she wrote on Facebook that it was "gonna be fun to tell the defendant
they're GUILTY." The trial, however, wasn't over.

"I'm sorry, very sorry," Jons, 20, of Warren told Macomb County Circuit
Judge Diane Druzinski.

The post was discovered by the defense team Aug. 11 - before the defense
had even started its case - and Jons was removed from the jury the next
day.

Druzinski told Jons that it didn't matter whether she used Facebook to
express an opinion or simply spoke to a friend about the case.

"You violated your oath. ... You had decided she was already guilty
without hearing the other side," the judge said.

By Oct. 1, Jons must submit an essay about the 6th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and pay a $250 fine.

Jons declined comment outside court. Her attorney, John Giancotti, said the outcome was appropriate. He declined further comment.

Jons was a juror in a criminal case against Leann Etchison, who was charged with resisting arrest. She was eventually found guilty.

The Facebook post was found by Jaxon Goodman, the 17-year-old son of Etchison's defense lawyer.

"She'll think twice about how important being on a jury is," Goodman said.

=~=~=~=